

Eczema Herpeticum Complicating *Parthenium* Dermatitis

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Parthenium dermatitis is one of the most common causes of airborne contact dermatitis in India. Eczema herpeticum has been reported in association with various eczematous conditions, including *Parthenium* dermatitis. We report a case of eczema herpeticum in association with *Parthenium* dermatitis. Because *Parthenium* dermatitis is a common condition in this region, one should be aware of this complication so that appropriate treatment is not delayed.

PARTHENIUM DERMATITIS is one of the most common causes of airborne contact dermatitis in India. The ubiquitous presence of the plant *Parthenium hysterophorus* leads to frequent relapses in the affected individual. Eczema herpeticum is a disseminated herpes simplex virus (HSV) infection occurring as a complication of an eczematous skin disease. We report a case of eczema herpeticum in a patient with *Parthenium* dermatitis.

Case Report

A 45-year-old farmer with patch-test-confirmed *Parthenium* dermatitis for the previous 5 years presented with numerous grouped papulovesicular lesions, of 1 week's duration, on the face. He had neither a history of eczema in childhood nor any personal or family history of atopy. He had received numerous tapering courses of systemic prednisolone and was currently taking prednisolone (10 mg by mouth [PO], once daily). He had no previous history of herpes labialis or genital herpes. On examination, there were grouped papulovesicular lesions and few erosions with crust formation on the cheeks, eyelids, and forehead (Fig 1). The face was edematous with dermatitic lesions in the background (Fig 2). There were no labial or oral erosions. A Tzanck smear from the vesicular lesions and erosions showed multinucleate giant cells. After a clinical

diagnosis of eczema herpeticum, he was treated with acyclovir (800 mg PO, five times daily for 7 days), and the lesions cleared completely (Fig 3). The higher dosage of acyclovir was chosen because of the immunosuppressed state of the patient and the possibility of dissemination.

Discussion

Although the terms "eczema herpeticum" and "Kaposi's varicelliform eruption" can be used interchangeably, a recent study defined eczema herpeticum (EH) as an HSV infection occurring as a complication of an eczematous skin disease, most frequently atopic dermatitis (AD), whereas the term "Kaposi's varicelliform eruption" is used for a cutaneous HSV infection in noneczematous dermatoses.¹ Kaposi's varicelliform eruption and EH have been associated with various dermatoses (including Darier's disease, pemphigus foliaceus, mycosis fungoides, Sézary syndrome,



Figure 1. Multiple grouped papulovesicular lesions with erosions and crusting.

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Figure 2. Facial edema due to eczema herpeticum in *Parthenium* dermatitis.

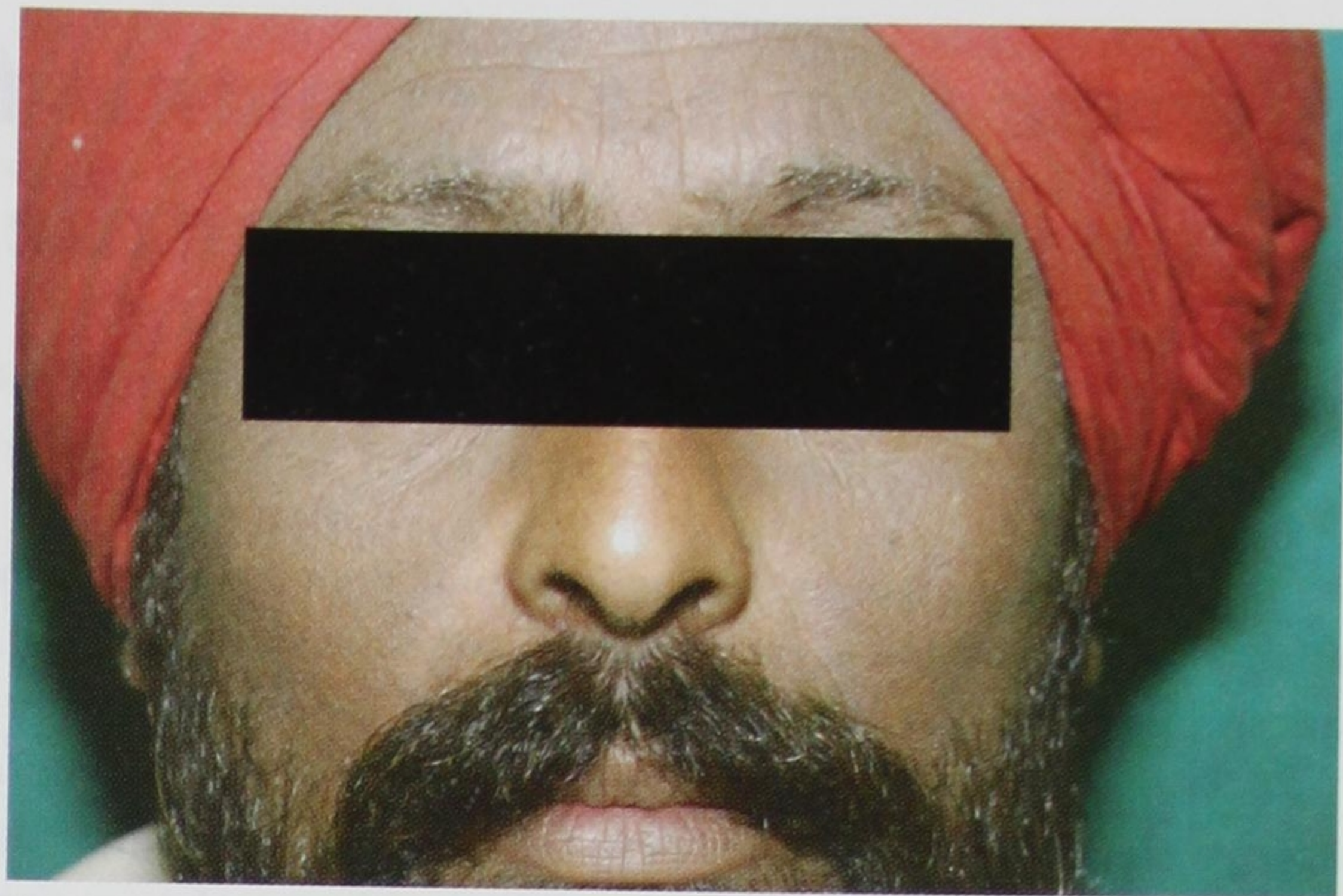


Figure 3. Complete clearance of eczema herpeticum after 1 week of acyclovir therapy.

ichthyosis vulgaris, and Hailey-Hailey disease) and have also developed in patients with burns and during the course of corticosteroid withdrawal.¹⁻⁵ Kaposi's varicelliform eruption in association with irritant contact dermatitis has also been described.⁶ There are few reports of occurrences of EH in association with *Parthenium* dermatitis.^{7,8} In India, about 93% of adults are seropositive for HSV-1 by the age of 45 years.⁹ Hence, it is likely that this episode was a recurrent HSV infection.

The predominance of AD in every series of patients with EH may be explained by a significantly lower number of type I interferon-producing plasmacytic dendritic cells in the AD lesions than are found in other inflammatory skin diseases.¹ Defective skin barrier function and immunosuppression associated either with the therapy for the dermatoses or with the patient's debilitated state itself may be a plausible explanation for the widespread dissemination of HSV infection in patients with dermatoses other than AD.

In regions where *Parthenium* dermatitis is a common condition, one should be aware of this complication in order to initiate appropriate and timely treatment.

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